



Testimony by Rita Malenczyk  
Eastern Connecticut State University  
Before the Higher Education and  
Employment Advancement Committee  
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Good afternoon, Senator Bye, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. For the record, I am Rita Malenczyk, Professor of English and Director of the Writing Program and Writing Center at Eastern Connecticut State University (ECSU). I am also President-elect of the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the national organization devoted to the administration and development of college writing programs. I am here to offer comments on Senate Bill 40, *An Act Concerning Open Access to College Level Courses*.

I have directed Eastern's writing program since 1994, and I would like to share with you some details of a course we developed on our campus over ten years ago which has been, we feel, extremely successful in meeting the needs of students who may not be as prepared as others for the writing demands of college. The course is called ENG 100Plus, and it allows students to receive college credit for one semester of work – the same amount of time required to complete the standard first-year writing class, English 100.

The goal in the standard first-year writing class at ECSU (English 100, College Writing) is to provide students with a solid set of writing skills and strategies that can serve them in college and the world of work. Because some students who attend Eastern are farther from this kind of self-sufficiency than others, as evidenced on their writing placement exams, the University provides additional instruction to help bring them up to speed. Until the fall of 2000, this additional instruction was generally provided through a course, entitled "Basic Writing Skills," which was offered through the Learning Resource Center. Students who placed into Basic Writing Skills were required to complete that course before moving on to English 100, College Writing.

In the fall semester of 1999, however, English 100P, College Writing *Plus* was piloted through the English department. After several successful pilot sections, the course was approved by the university's writing board, curriculum committee, and general education program committee. As of fall 2000, Basic Writing Skills was discontinued, and since then all so-called developmental writers have been enrolled in English 100Plus. This new class meets for five hours a week (two of these hours are designated "lab" time) and completes the first-year writing requirement just as the standard College Writing course does. The intention of English 100Plus is to allow students who need additional writing instruction to receive it in conjunction with English 100, thus completing their first-year writing requirement in one semester rather than two and at the cost of five rather than six credits.

During the two hours per week designated as lab time, students choose (with some guidance from the instructor) from a number of activities which will help them improve as writers. Lab is not simply a grammar drill workshop, although many students choose to do a variety of grammar exercises. The lab is structured to allow for individualized instruction based on the variety of needs of Eastern's underprepared writing students. In reviewing a sample of placement essays from 1998, we noted that students who placed into Basic Writing Skills had difficulties with insufficient development of ideas, tendency toward broad generalization, simplistic organization of ideas, sentence fragments, punctuation errors, mixed constructions, faulty predication, and errors in usage. The essays written by developmental students also exhibited other problems (lack of introduction or conclusion paragraphs, lack of focus, and false starts – indicated by large crossed out passages) that pointed to their inexperience as writers. These problems are typical of students who have not had a great deal of instruction in writing and/or whose experiences with writing instruction have been frustrating and demeaning. Such students do need more writing instruction than their peers in College Writing, then, but this extra instruction should not focus on issues of grammar alone. The lab component of College Writing Plus, therefore, is used for a variety of small-group and individual activities (from sentence-combining exercises to brainstorming sessions, from discussions of appropriate topics to collaborative writing of introductions) that help bring these students up to speed within the context of the real, college-level writing projects that are required for successful completion of the first-year writing requirement.

A key component of English 100Plus is the presence in the lab classroom of writing tutors. Two trained peer tutors are typically present in the classroom during lab time. They are also expected to hold "office hours" that allow for longer sessions with individual students.

Outcomes assessment has indicated that ENG 100Plus has been successful. English Department readers review portfolios of student writing at the end of each academic year, and our evidence indicates that students taking ENG 100Plus complete the course at the same level as those taking ENG 100. Furthermore, research conducted by Marsha Davis, a statistician on the ECSU faculty, shows that a high percentage of students who take that course pass it.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.